



# THE KEATS Foundation

Registered Charity: 1147589

## THE KEATSIAN

*The Newsletter of the Keats Foundation, Spring 2021*

### Donations

Keats Foundation wishes to acknowledge with very many thanks the following generous donations and bequests:

Justin Barnard, Keatsian, a legacy of £1000.

Kiyoshi Nishiyama, Professor Emeritus of Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan, a donation of £100.

Peter Phillips, a donation of £150.

Brenda Walton in memory of her friend, Janet Cheshire, a donation of £100.

### Time to renew your subscription to the Keats Foundation

As we gear up to bring the Keats Foundation out of the period of Covid restrictions, we are busy planning future events.

Later this year, in November, we hope to stage The John Keats Anniversary Lecture (in London's Guildhall), followed the same evening by the premiere of Emily Hall's choral settings of lines from some of Keats's poems. And for next year we are planning our seventh Keats Conference at Keats House, Hampstead, on 20-22 May 2022 - as well as an *Eve of St Agnes* event at Keats House in January 2022, the Annual John Keats Lecture and the Birthday wreath laying ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

We hope to be able to produce more videos of readings of Keats's poetry and to stage a performance featuring readings of letters between Keats, Fanny Brawne and Fanny Keats.

We have plenty of activities planned, and your subscription makes it possible for us to prepare and stage them.

A year's Steadfast Supporter membership costs £28 (if you use PayPal) or £25 (if you pay by cheque). Please go to our website page:

<https://keatsfoundation.com/support/>

Our Policy on privacy and holding information is set out on the Keats Foundation website here:

<https://keatsfoundation.com/privacy-policy/>

## **Keats Foundation Anniversary Lecture**

Provisional plans are in place for The John Keats Anniversary Lecture to be held at Guildhall, London, in November 2021. The speaker will be Nicholas Roe, Wardlaw Professor of English Literature at the University of St Andrews, and author of *John Keats. A New Life*.

## **Keats Foundation Annual Lecture 2022**

The Keats Foundation Annual Lecture 2022 will be delivered by the distinguished biographer, Lucasta Miller, author of *The Bronte Myth*, *L.E.L. the Lost Life and Mysterious Death of the 'Female Byron'*, and, most recently, *Keats: A Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* (2021). The date and location are to be confirmed but most likely will be during the summer months.

## **Keats Foundation Bicentenary Conference 2022**

The Keats Foundation Bicentenary Conference, scheduled for May this year, was unavoidably cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. All being well, the next Keats Foundation Bicentenary Conference will be held over the weekend of Friday 20-Sunday 22 May 2022. Please keep those days free! Further details will follow.

## **Music for Keats**

Keats Foundation is very glad to announce that it has commissioned Emily Hall, an established composer, to set to music for three male voices four well-known quotations from John Keats's verse. It is hoped that this will be a lasting and memorable way of contributing to this year's celebration of the life and works of John

Keats on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his death in Rome on 23rd February 1821. It is anticipated that the first public performance will be given in November. Emily Hall, a composer and violinist, has an established reputation for writing music which combines modernity with classical precision. Her work includes five operas, song cycles and many songs. She trained at the Royal College of Music and has held the post of Associate Professor (Composing) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in the City of London.

## **Keats's Odes – the Keats Foundation and Keats House recordings:**

Keats Foundation website features the haunting readings by the actor, Matthew Coulton, of Keats's 1819 Odes: *Indolence*, *Nightingale*, *Grecian Urn*, *Psyche*, *Autumn* and *Melancholy*

As part of the arrangements made to commemorate the bicentenary of Keats's death on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021, the Keats Foundation in collaboration with Keats House, Hampstead, and Keats200 has provided the City of London with an Introduction to the readings of the Odes and a link to the relevant part of the Keats Foundation website. Published in the City of London's 'Our City Together Newsletter', viewers may read the Introduction to the Odes by Professor Nicholas Roe, Chair of the Keats Foundation, and link to the Keats Foundation website to hear the readings.

Here is the link to access the City of London's newsletter:

<https://www.ourcitytogether.london/do/keats-six-odes>

Matthew Coulton's superb new readings of Keats's six odes were specially commissioned and recorded in 2019 by the Keats Foundation, in collaboration with Keats House, Hampstead, to celebrate the bicentenary of the poet's most creative year.

During 1819 Keats composed some of the greatest poems in the language, including 'The Eve of St Agnes', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', 'Lamia' and his famous 'Bright Star' sonnet. He made progress with his epic *Hyperion*. And at the heart of Keats's writing during these momentous months were his six odes, read here with passion, tenderness, and pathos by Matthew Coulton as if we are overhearing the poet himself reciting these words for the first time.

Readers have often wondered whether Keats's odes should be read in a sequence, forming six lyrical reflections on the Shakespearean themes of life, beauty and art, time, transience and mortality. It is possible that the first to be composed was 'Ode on Indolence', followed in spring and early summer by 'Ode to Psyche', 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode on Melancholy' (all composed at Wentworth Place, Hampstead – now Keats House), with 'To Autumn' as a later lyrical impulse dating from September at Winchester. All the poems grew out of

Keats's experiments with sonnet forms, constituting independent yet interwoven meditations with similarities of theme, style, and phrasing.

With little internal evidence from the poems or from Keats's letters, chronological sequencing of the poems (apart from 'To Autumn') is inevitably conjectural. But we do have one clue as to how Keats wished his odes to be arranged and read: this is the running order that he devised for five of them in his final 1820 collection of poems, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*. Here, Keats sequenced his poems in two groups: 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to Psyche' form a lyrical trio, followed a few pages later by 'To Autumn' and 'Ode on Melancholy' paired together. Perhaps this arrangement allows us to hear a melancholy undersong that links the poems, entwining joy with sorrow and gathering towards the 'cloudy trophies' with which 'Ode on Melancholy' concludes.

All readers agree that Keats's 1819 odes established his place among the English poets and numerous poets from Tennyson to Owen to Heaney have been fascinated by the poems' formal mastery and haunting verbal music. 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'To Autumn' may now have most appeal for readers. Yet it is perhaps the enigmatic 'Ode on Indolence' – a poem that seems to have been suggested by an opium-induced dream – that carries us furthest into the mystery of Keats's creativity to encounter its terrifying, troubling presiders: Love, Ambition and, lurking darkly in the shadows, his 'demon Poesy'.

Hearing Matthew Coulton's wonderfully fresh readings allows us to enjoy the unmistakable tones and turns of Keats's odes, as we contemplate the bicentenary of their poet's death at Rome on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1821. The fact that Keats died of an incurable respiratory disease should enable us to appreciate all the more deeply, in the long months of Covid-19, the powerful human spirit with which his poems live and speak to us now – as they will for future generations over many years to come.

## **Annual Wreath-Laying at Westminster Abbey**

The annual wreath laying at Westminster Abbey is provisionally scheduled for 30 October 2021.

The Keats Foundation is a Registered Charity in the UK (No. 1147589).